

Opinions about union membership

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A recent study by the Pew Research Center explores Americans' views of labor unions and of the 30-year decline of union membership rates. The report, titled "[Mixed views of impact of long-term decline in union membership](#)" (*U.S. Politics & Policy*, April 27, 2015), reports on data from a phone survey of 1,500 respondents. The results show how people with varying demographic, political, and geographic backgrounds perceive unions.

Opinions about the decline in union membership were almost evenly split: 45 percent of respondents said the decline is mostly a bad thing and 43 percent said it is mostly a good thing. Regarding the overall favorability of labor unions, however, 48 percent of respondents said they had a favorable view of unions, 39 percent had an unfavorable view, and 14 percent didn't know or responded "other."

Men and women in the study had similar views of labor unions. About 48 percent of men had favorable views and 41 percent had unfavorable views, compared with 47 percent of women who saw labor unions favorably and 37 percent who saw them unfavorably. Among racial groups, Blacks showed higher rates of favorability towards unions (60 percent) than did Hispanics (49 percent) and Whites (45 percent). Lower income groups were also found to have more favorable opinions of unions than people in higher income groups. Among geographic groups, people in the Midwest region held the most positive views while those in the South had the most unfavorable attitudes toward labor unions.

Democrats and Republicans had contrasting views on the decline of union membership. Among Democrats, only 30 percent said the decline has been mostly good for the country, compared with 62 percent of Republicans. Democrats also had a more favorable overall view of unions than did other respondents: favorable views of unions were held by 65 percent of Democrats, 48 percent of Independents, and just 28 percent of Republicans.

When the researchers asked whether workers in various sectors should be able to unionize, 82 percent of respondents said manufacturing and factory workers should be able to; this was the highest proportion of any of the six sectors asked about in the survey. The lowest proportion was 62 percent, which was for allowing the unionization of fast-food workers.

The survey also inquired about respondents' views of business corporations. Republicans held a more favorable view of big businesses than did Democrats. Only 44 percent of Democrats indicated they had favorable views of corporations, compared with 60 percent of Republicans. The South region of the United States was also more likely to have favorable views of corporations, with 54 percent of respondents indicating approval, compared with 49 percent of the West, 44 percent of the Northeast, and 42 percent of the Midwest. As you might expect, families with greater incomes also viewed corporations more positively.